

February 28, 2012

John Maher, Co-Owner of Berlin Spirits

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 5291 to raise the minimum wage

To the Co-chairs and members of the Labor Committee

Good afternoon, members of the Labor Committee. I am here as a small business owner to support increasing Connecticut's minimum wage.

Some people say that increasing the minimum wage is the wrong thing to do, that it's not the right time and that it'll hurt small businesses. They'll tell you that if the minimum wage goes up, they'll fire people. They'll tell you that the sky is falling and that an increased minimum wage is what's bringing it down. And I tell you, as a small business owner who pays all my employees above Connecticut's minimum wage, that that is absolute baloney.

I've been in business for the last 3 years, yes three years of this recession. I've partnered with a veteran of my industry who has been active and consistently in business here in Connecticut for more than 20 years. One thing that I've learned during this time working with my partner Frank Faccio and our employees, is that if you pay your employees enough to make a decent living, they'll pay you back through loyalty and hard work.

Our employees give 100% everyday. They're invested in what we do here and it shows through they're work. They understand that somewhere else right down the road, there is an employer – a big box store – that does not appreciate their work or think they are worth being paid a wage that allows them to provide for their families. My partner and I, and Mom & Pop businesses like ours, know that our workforce is our strongest asset and we treat each of our employees with the dignity and respect that their work deserves.

Increasing the minimum wage across the board, not only keeps good, hard working employees loyal to good employers, but it also levels the playing field across the board. When workers make more, they can spend more and that's a proven fact that no one can dispute. If there are any business owners or legislators that are still on the fence about this issue, you may want to take notes, it's really simple: Paying workers a fair wage is not only good for them, and for their employers, but simply good for the economy as a whole.

Right now, there are businesses all across the state that have employees who can't afford to buy the product that they sell at work. I'm not talking Ferrari's or even flat-screen TV's; I'm talking about milk, juice and mealtime essentials that will last through three square meals a day from payday to payday for a family of four. It's what my partner and I want for our families, and we know it's what our employee's

need – so we pay them fairly. When you're only pulling in \$8.25 an hour, sacrificing a meal for staples like gasoline, clothing or rent is a definite reality; it's bad for all of us and it has to stop.

It's time that we took a strong stance on this issue. Legislators, business owner's and whoever else thinks that increasing the minimum wage is the wrong thing to do, need to wake up to reality. Your employees are working hard for you, now it's time you work hard for your employees. Business owners pay them right so that they can make a decent living; legislators, protect your constituents now and make sure the opportunities that they work so hard for – the home, the car, the children and the dog – is not just an illusion buried beneath debt. Vote yes for fair treatment and fair pay for all of Connecticut's workforce. Vote for an increased minimum wage. Vote yes for HB 5291.